
IDEA FUNDING COALITION

March 1, 2004

The Honorable Rob Simmons
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Simmons:

The IDEA Funding Coalition writes in strong support of HR 3802, the Mandatory IDEA Full Funding Compromise Act, which would fully fund the federal share of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This bill will finally allow Congress to fulfill its 29-year-old promise to provide 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure for every child in special education.

Since its inception, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free and appropriate public education. Despite the positive influence of IDEA on public education, the federal government has never fully funded the program, forcing state and local taxpayers to pay for a greater share of expenses. With the current \$11 billion federal funding shortfall, districts have been forced to reduce services under their general education budget as they redirect dollars to cover the lack of federal funding.

Approximately 13 percent of public school students receive assistance through special education. These children have disabilities that require special attention and additional resources. If we are serious about reforming education and leaving no child behind, we should start with those children with the greatest need. Congress should start by fully funding IDEA.

In the 29-year history of IDEA, the federal funding contribution has always fallen far short of the original full funding commitment. As special education becomes more extensive and expensive, local taxpayers have been expected to absorb the shortfall in federal funds as school districts have been forced to redirect funding out of their general education budgets. Congress has made significant progress in recent years, but it is still only funding IDEA at 18.7 percent instead of the promised 40 percent. However, at the suggested increases of \$1 billion per year for IDEA, Congress will never reach its 40 percent commitment.

Your bill provides for full funding in eight years by maintaining the \$10 billion base discretionary and making the increases of \$2 billion a year mandatory. In addition, you have taken steps to eliminate the pitting of special education services against those services that benefit all of the students by allowing a portion of IDEA funds to be used for other educational purposes. By requiring schools to be in compliance with the law before they take advantage of this new flexibility, the amendment ensures that the needs of special education students will continue to be met.

Special education costs are increasing more rapidly than other educational costs. Students with disabilities have a right to the same educational opportunities as all other students, and the federal government has an obligation to pay for its fair share of these costs. It's past time to remove IDEA from the annual funding showdown and make good on a 29-year-old promise. We applaud your leadership on this issue and pledge our support for the incorporation of this bill into the full reauthorization of IDEA this Congress.

Thank you for support on this important matter.

Sincerely,

American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women
American Counseling Association
American Federation of Teachers
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
International Reading Association
National Association of Black School Educators
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
School Social Work Association of America